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PRESS RELEASE

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Gridley Man Found Guilty of Brutal Rape of Homeless Woman

After deliberating for about four hours, a Butte County jury today handed down guilty verdicts against a Gridley man accused of raping a woman at an Oroville homeless encampment in 2019.

Kevin Mitchell Valdez, 31, of Gridley, had been charged with forcible rape, forcible sexual assault, assault by means likely to produce great bodily harm, and false imprisonment. During the trial, the victim testified she was at Hammon Park in Oroville with her brother and some friends during the early morning hours of August 14, 2019 when Valdez approached them. Valdez offered to let the group party in a nearby home he was renovating. The victim did not know Valdez, and described Valdez as making several unwanted passes at her, culminating in her pushing him off her after he kissed her.

The victim told the jury she and her companions left the residence and drove to an olive orchard near the intersection of Table Mountain Boulevard and Grand Avenue in Oroville, where the victim had established a camp near a cluster of other homeless camps. Valdez went with them, offering to help with one of the victim's friends who was unconscious due to alcohol intoxication.

As the victim spread out blankets and a pillow in the bed of her pickup truck, Valdez placed his hand down her shorts. Deciding she had enough of his unwanted advances, the victim tried to obtain her cell phone from the cab of the truck in order to call for help. However, Valdez grabbed the victim around the neck and threw her to the ground, repeatedly punching and kicking her on her head and face.

A nearby homeless woman heard the victim scream and ran to the victim's campsite. The woman testified she saw Valdez on top of the victim. The woman and several other homeless people who responded to the scene yelled at Valdez to stop, and he ultimately fled. The victim told the jury that Valdez had just begun raping her when the responding woman and other homeless persons rescued her.

The victim drove away and called 911, meeting Oroville Police at Bedrock Park. Officers took her to Oroville Hospital, where a nurse assigned to the Butte County Sexual Assault Response Team performed a forensic exam. The nurse told the jury she obtained swabs from the victim's body to identify the assailant's DNA. She also testified to documenting multiple abrasions,

bruises, and cuts all over the victim's body.

A criminalist from the California Department of Justice Forensics Laboratory in Redding testified at trial about locating Valdez' DNA on two different parts of the victim's body.

"The victim in this case was incredibly brave, taking the witness stand to face the man who beat and raped her two years before," said Deputy District Attorney Jeff Greeson, who prosecuted the case. "Without her, we would not have been able to take this dangerous rapist off the streets. I would also like to thank the 12 jurors and 3 alternates that took their duties as jurors seriously and served despite the ongoing restrictions and dangers of COVID-19. Defendants in a criminal case deserve a fair trial, and without people willing to serve as jurors, our justice system simply cannot work."

"One of the tragedies of our struggles with homelessness in our community is that homeless people are easy prey for criminals, this is especially so for homeless women," said District Attorney Mike Ramsey. "No one deserves to go through what the victim in this case went through, and every person deserves to feel safe in Butte County, even if they are struggling with problems like homelessness in their life. We do not tolerate crimes against these vulnerable people, as no one is above the law nor beneath its protection."

Butte County Superior Court Judge Kristen Lucena, who presided over the trial, set the case for sentencing on September 30. Valdez is facing 11 years and 8 months in prison. He remains in Butte County Jail without bail pending sentencing.

